

The devil in the white city by erik larson

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The book "The Devil in the White City" by Erik Larson describes peculiarities of Chicago life in the Gilded Age. It was the time of industrial growth and development of materialism and political corruption. The government wasn't bothering of checking corruption in financial and political institutions. I think that "The Devil in the White City" is one of the most interesting and exciting books which has excellently captured the image of the Gilded Age.

Nevertheless, the book is not simple as it may seem at the first glance, because the author has managed to combine positive shifts in architectural design and industry with horrible murders committed by serial killer. The book is shocking and thought-provoking. The author challenges traditional ideas and viewpoints offering real picture of what the Gilded Age was in the history. The work is non-fiction and from the very first pages the author introduces two men who are considered to have affected the legendary World's Fair in 1893 - Daniel Burnham and Herman Webster Mudgett.

Larson describes Burnham as successful architect with credible reputation and experience in building the fair. The author follows him from the very first steps in his career when he was unsuccessful apprentice who had failed to enter Yale and Harvard. In the image of Daniel the author tries to show the audience the way Daniel has created his famous architectural exposition. Larson introduces Herman Webster Mudgett as opposition to Daniel Burnham to show that there is good and evil. Neither good nor evil can exist without counter-side. Herman Mudgett uses the alias Dr. H. H. Holmes to lure innocent victims with his wit and charm.

Actually, Dr. Holms is series killer who sees an excellent opportunity to kill people by attracting them into his ' castle' - mysterious hotel. Dr. Holms manages to hypnotize women and to gain their trust and admiration by promising them financial support and chance to see the whole world. As a result, women are simply vanishing. The most shocking thing is that Dr. Holmes sells their skeletons to universities. Dr. Holmes is a brilliant psychologist. For example, when he sees that people are suspicious he tries to use his charisma and to persuade that he doesn't know where women are. Firstly it may seem that it is Dr.

Holms who is to be labeled ' Devil in the City'. In the images of Burnham and Dr. Holmes the author shows skillfully that beauty co-exists with ugliness and good co-exists with evil. No period in the history can be marked as good or bad as there are always positive and negative moments. Interestingly, Larson defines these two characters as ' artists' providing two different viewpoints towards the World's Fair. Larson believes that these different perspectives are equally important as they " embodied an element of the great dynamic that characterized the rush of America towards the twentieth century".

(p. xi) Burnham and Dr. Holms are representatives of Chicago in the end of the 1800s. Through their images the author shows how the city looks like from negative and positive sides. Actually, the author is willing to show that his book is about eternal battle between good and evil. However, there are no winners and losers. There is only one devil in the city. Larson takes readers into the minds of cunning killer and skillful architect, though he doesn't explain who the devil in the city is. This question remains uncertain.

The Gilded Age is a matter of particular interest for Erik Larson. In the book he supports his theory in several ways. Actually, book's chapters provide different perspectives and viewpoints as life in Chicago was dubious in those times. Larson describes perspectives of Burnham and Dr. Holmes stressing that they are equally important to the city's representation. Burnham is representation of pride and glory, whereas Dr. Holmes represents the dark side of Chicago's life. Larson argues that World's Fair plays important role for Chicago and other US cities.

For example, he writes that Paris organized an exposition which "showed off France's self-proclaimed superiority in art, manufacturing, science, and engineering". (p. xxi) Similar role World's Fair has played in America. Eiffel Tower was something people had never seen before. And Burnham becomes obsessive with idea to create his own Eiffel Tower. In those times Chicago was extremely dirty town and Daniel decided to change it by changing his way of thinking. The author views in Daniel the chance for improvement and development. Consequently, Dr. Holmes is representative of corrupt side of the city.

He is the embodiment of scandal affairs and shady politicians. Dr. Holms is viewed as darkness in the city of lights and joyful hopes. Dr. Holms seems to represent the Gilded Age as, on the one hand, he is smart, charming and wealthy, and, on the other hand, he is bloodthirsty and wicked. At the end of the novel Larson compares perspectives of Dr. Holms and Daniel Burnham uniting different aspects of Chicago. Burnham and Dr. Holms are different people, but they share similar goals. They are both viewed as architects.

Burnham is willing to create something new and to challenge traditional viewpoints, whereas Dr.

Holms sets the background for killing. The author “ found it so marvellously strange that both these men should be operating at the same time in history, within blocks of each other, both creating powerful legacies, one of brilliance and energy, the other of sorrow and darkness”. (p. xi) Larson believes that there is no other way to portray the Gilded Age and to show main driving forces in 1893. He shows that technical advances are combined with unimaginable evil. I think that the author is very convincing in his portraying the realities of Chicago life as he doesn't represent only one side.

Instead, he encompasses both perspectives. To understand Chicago better one has to look at the city through the eyes of dark devil and white angel. Despite the fact that all events are not real, it seems that the whole book is a true event. Erik Larson has done brilliant job representing all events of the fair in such a way that it is hardly possible to dispute them. However, the book is shocking when the author deepens in details concerning Dr. Holmes and his victims. Nevertheless, every white city has its dark evil.